UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
LIMITED

A/CONF.171/PC/L.5
15 April 1994

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT
Third session
4-22 April 1994
Agenda item 6

DRAFT FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE CONFERENCE

The family, its roles, rights, composition and structure

(Chapter V of the draft programme of action
of the Conference)

Text submitted by the Chairman, Mr. Nicolaas Biegman (Netherlands)
(Working Group II), on the basis of negotiations held on
document A/CONF.171/PC/5

Chapter V

THE FAMILY, ITS ROLES, RIGHTS, COMPOSITION AND STRUCTURE

A. Diversity of family structures and composition

Basis for action

5.1. While various concepts of the family exist in different social, cultural and political systems, families do constitute basic units of social life and as such are entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support. The process of rapid demographic and socio-economic change throughout the world has influenced patterns of family formation and family life, generating considerable change in family composition and structure. Traditional notions of gender-based division of parental and domestic functions and participation in the paid labour force do not reflect current realities and aspirations, as more and more women in all parts of the world take up paid employment outside the home. At the same time, widespread migration, forced shifts of population caused by violent conflicts and wars, urbanization, poverty, natural disasters and other causes of displacement have placed greater strains on the family, since assistance from extended family support networks is often no longer available. Parents are often more dependent on assistance from third parties than they used to be in order to reconcile work and family responsibilities. This is particularly the case when policies and programmes that affect the family ignore the existing diversity of family forms, or are insufficiently sensitive to the needs and rights of women and children.

Objective

5.2. The objectives are to develop policies and laws that better support the family, contribute to its stability, and take into account its plurality of forms, particularly the growing number of single-parent households; to establish social security measures that address the social, cultural and economic factors behind the increasing costs of child-rearing; and to promote equality of opportunity for family members, especially the rights of women and children in the family.

Actions

5.3. Governments, in cooperation with employers, should provide and promote means to facilitate compatibility between labour force participation and parental responsibilities, especially for single-parent households with young children. Such means could include health insurance and social security, day-care centres and facilities for breast-feeding mothers within the work premises, kindergartens, part-time jobs, paid parental leave, paid maternity leave, flexible work schedules, and [reproductive] and child health services.

5.4. When formulating socio-economic development policies, special consideration should be given to increasing the earning power of all adult members of economically deprived families, including the elderly and women who work in the home, and to enabling children to be educated rather than compelled to work.

Particular attention should be paid to needy single parents, especially those who are responsible wholly or in part for the support of children and other dependants, through ensuring payment of at least minimum wages and allowances, credit, education, funding for women's self-help groups and stronger legal enforcement of male parental financial responsibilities.

5.5. Governments should take effective action to eliminate all forms of coercion and discrimination in policies and practices related to marriage, unions and the family. Measures should be adopted and enforced to eliminate child marriages and female genital mutilation. Assistance should be provided to persons with disabilities in the exercise of their family and reproductive rights and responsibilities.

5.5 bis. Governments should maintain and further develop mechanisms to document changes and undertake studies on family composition and structure, especially on the prevalence of one-person households, and single-parent and multigenerational families.

B. Socio-economic support to the family

Basis for action

5.6. Families are sensitive to strains induced by social and economic changes. It is essential to grant particular assistance to families in difficult life situations. Conditions have worsened for many families in recent years, owing to lack of gainful employment and measures taken by Governments seeking to balance their budget by reducing social expenditures. There are increasing numbers of vulnerable families, including single-parent families headed by women, poor families with elderly members or those with disabilities, refugee and displaced families, and families with members affected by acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) or other terminal diseases, substance dependence, child abuse and domestic violence. Increased labour migrations and refugee movements are an additional source of family tension and disintegration and are contributing to increased responsibilities for women. In many urban environments, millions of children and youths are left to their own devices as family ties break down, and hence are increasingly exposed to risks such as dropping out of school, labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Objective

5.7. The objective is to ensure that all social and economic development policies are fully responsive to the diverse and changing needs and rights of families and their individual members, and provide necessary support and protection, particularly to the most vulnerable families and the most vulnerable family members.

Actions

5.8. Governments should formulate family-sensitive policies in the field of housing, work, health, social security and education in order to create an

environment supportive of the family, taking into account its various forms and functions, and should support educational programmes concerning parental roles, parental skills and child development. Governments should, in conjunction with other relevant parties, develop the capacity to monitor the impact of social and economic decisions and actions on the well-being of families, on the status of women within families, and on the ability of families to meet the basic needs of their members.

5.9. All levels of Government, non-governmental organizations and concerned community organizations should develop innovative ways to provide more effective assistance to families and the individuals within them who may be affected by specific problems, such as extreme poverty, chronic unemployment, illness, domestic and sexual violence, dowry payments, drug or alcohol dependence, incest, and child abuse, neglect or abandonment.

5.10. Governments should support and develop the appropriate mechanisms to assist families caring for children, the dependent elderly and family members with disabilities, including those resulting from human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/AIDS, encourage the sharing of these responsibilities by men and women, and support the viability of multigenerational families.

5.11. Governments and the international community should give greater attention to, and manifest greater solidarity with, poor families and families that have been victimized by war, drought, famine, other natural disasters, and racial and ethnic discrimination or violence. Every effort should be made to keep their members together, to reunite them in case of separation, and to ensure access to government programmes designed to support and assist these vulnerable families.

5.11 bis. Governments should assist single-parent families, and pay special attention to the needs of widows and orphans. All efforts should be made to assist the building of family-like ties in especially difficult circumstances, for example, those involving street children.